Women of the 16mm Sector

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Tanya Goldman

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research Tanya Goldman
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In researching the mid-20th century nontheatrical sector, I've spent many hours poring over the pages of *Business Screen*, *The Educational Screen*, *Film World and A-V World News*, and more. What I encountered was a seemingly endless parade of (white) men who presided over companies and the boards of the audio-visual trade associations that constituted the public face of industry interests. I found myself stopping anytime I found a woman in the mix and began collecting their stories. The first two volumes in this series feature career snapshots of 37 such women. This third volume adds 21 more.

Information featured in this booklet comes primarily from the Media History Digital Library, publications held at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, and my own collection of nontheatrical film ephemera; it is supplemented, when possible, by existing scholarship and online sources. It focuses primarily on figures active during the first three decades following the Second World War.

Even as the 16mm sector afforded comparatively more opportunities for women than the 35mm mainstream, the materials I've encountered also reflect an industry with limited opportunities available to women of color. I hope future research uncovers exceptions to this tendency.

— Tanya Goldman, July 2024

Phyllis Abboud

Head of Acme Film & Video-tape Laboratories in Chicago, overseeing services to radio stations, television networks, producers, educators, hospitals, and industrial users of film and tape. Prior to Acme, she worked production and supervisory sales roles at agencies in Des Moines, Iowa and Omaha, Nebraska.

Source: *Business Screen*, 1969

Esther L. Berg

Held positions with the New York City Bureau of Visual Instruction and Teaching Film Custodians in latter half of the 1930s; chair of Educational Film Library Association's committee on "Films for International Understanding" following World War II. Frequent contributor to periodicals and pamphlets on educational applications of film in 1940s.

Source: *Film and Radio Guide*, 1946

Rosalind Burghardt

A more than twenty-five year career as 16mm Service Coordinator for Consolidated Film Industries, one of Los Angeles's leading film labs and processing companies.

Source: Company advertisement in *Business Screen*, 1958

Ruth J. Chamblee

Federal Programs Specialist for the National Audio-Visual Association (NAVA), tasked with keeping the organization abreast of government programs through bi-weekly member newsletters.

Source: *Film World and A/V News*, 1965

Linda Cooley

Educational Film Library Association (EFLA) staff member

Source: *Sightlines*, 1968

Margaret Divizia

Supervisor of Los Angeles County Schools' Audio-Visual Division and delegate for Department of Audio-Visual Instruction (DAVI) within the National Education Association (NEA)

Sources: Assorted coverage in *See and Hear*, *Business Screen*, and *The Educational Screen*, 1940s and '50s

Babette J. Doniger

President of international industrial and television film production company Television Snapshots and its successor company Editorial Films, Inc.; clients included *McCall's* magazine.

Source: Assorted coverage in *Business Screen* and media industry yearbooks in the 1950s

Calla Fricke

A two-decade career with sponsored film distributor and exchange Modern Talking Picture Service, rising to director of client service in the latter half of the 1960s; treasurer of the Association of Women in Radio and Television (AWRT) in the late 1960s.

Source: Assorted coverage in *Business Screen*

Millie

Goldsholl

Sponsored and design film producer and filmmaker; owner – with husband Mort – of Goldsholl Associates in Chicago. Clients included Sears Roebuck, Eastman Kodak, the Kimberly-Clark Corporation, Westinghouse and the Illinois Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

Source: *Business Screen*, May 1970

Recommended reading: *Up Is Down: Mid-Century Experiments in Advertising and Film at the Goldsholl Studio* published by Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University in 2018.

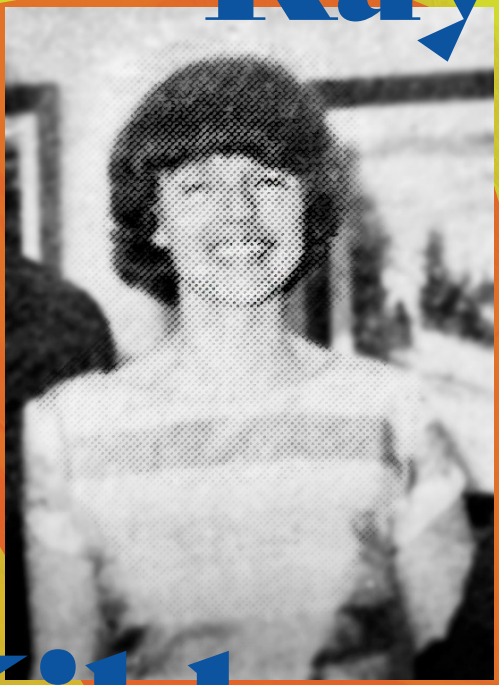
Following a brief career in Hollywood in the early 1930s, embarked on a 40+ year career in nonfiction film. As co-founder of Hartley Productions Inc. with husband Irving, Hartley produced scores of industrial and educational films and films for television, including Pan Am travelogues. Served as board member and treasurer of the Educational Film Producers Association in the 1950s. Directed, produced, and appeared in several films about religion and spirituality from the 1970s through '90s. The Hartley Film Foundation – a charity she founded in 1976 – exists to this day.

Sources: Coverage in *Business Screen* in 1950s and the Texas State Historical Association website and Wikipedia; several of her films are available online, including *The Therapeutic Touch: Healing in the New Age* (1979) via the Internet Archive.

Elda

(Voelkel) Hartley

Kay Kibby



Secretary-treasurer of Northern California chapter of Information Film Producers Association (IFPA) and staffer at nonfiction production company Palmer Studios in San Francisco

Source: *Business Screen*, 1968

Helaine S. Levin

Audio-visual officer of the American Dental Association, elected vice chair of the national Medical Audio Visual Institute in 1956

Source: *Business Screen*, 1956

Fifi

Oscard

The “attractive and trim brunette” with the “improbable name” at the helm of the Fifi Oscard Agency, the industrial film sector’s leading talent service. Oscard and her twelve employees maintained more than a hundred steady customers with regular casting needs and files with contact information for more than 5,000 actors, writers, and directors. Held lucrative exclusive contracts with about thirty well-known creatives, including the ubiquitous voice actor Alexander Scourby. Entered the field after raising two daughters; a “darn good tennis player”!

Source: *Business Screen*, 1967

Estelle

Redd

Films Incorporated's Dallas exchange manager

Source: Films Incorporated 16mm rental catalogs from the mid-1970s

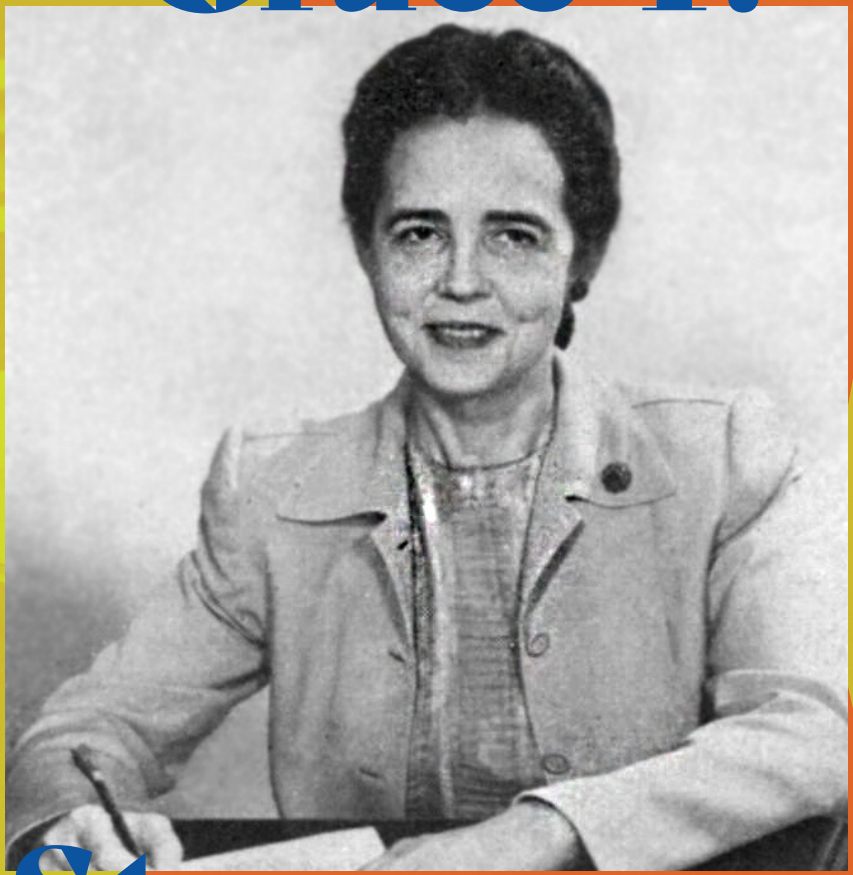
Lucille

South

Head of Midwest Audio-Visual Company, a 16mm equipment dealer in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Board member of the National Audio-Visual Dealers Association (NAVED) in late 1940s.

Source: Assorted coverage in *Educational Screen* and *Film and Radio Guide*, 1940s

Grace T. Stevenson



A more than forty year career as a champion of audio-visual education! Held positions in Indiana and California before moving to the Seattle Public Library system in 1927. Headed Seattle Public Library system's adult education and film department from 1945 to '51. Served as director of the American Library Association's American Heritage Project from 1951 to 1952, and then as the ALA's Deputy Executive Director until her retirement in 1965. A member of numerous professional associations, including the Pacific Northwest Library Association (PNLA), the National Education Association (NEA), NEA's Division of Audio-Visual Instruction (DAVI), and the Adult Education Association, of which she was president from 1959 to 1961.

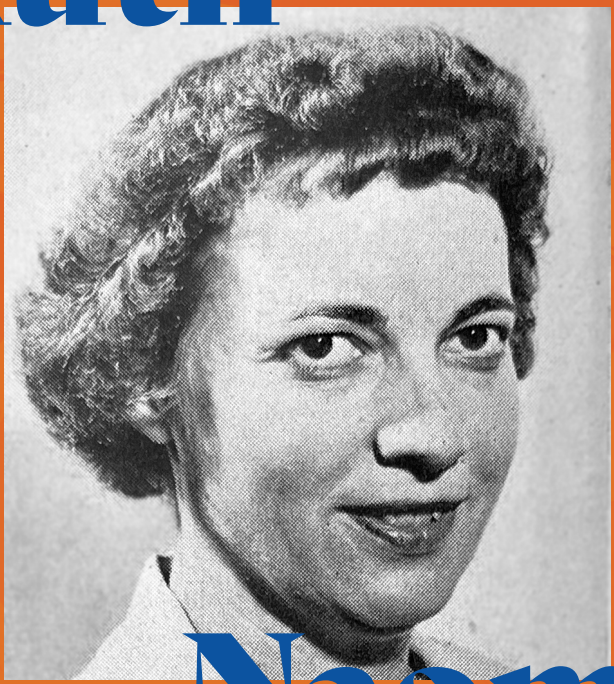
Source: Assorted coverage in the trade press, the *ALA Bulletin*, and the American Library Association Archives' catalog website hosted by the University of Illinois

Jackie Stillwell

Board member of the Information Film Producers Association (IFPA)

Source: Assorted *Business Screen* coverage, early 1970s

Ruth



Naomi

Founding Director of Audio-Visual Communication Center at Fenn College in Cleveland, Ohio. The center offered training on the use of audio-visual aids in professional and educational contexts.

Source: *Business Screen*, 1950

Thompson

Rita

Tremble

National Audio-Visual Association (NAVA)'s New England Regional Director

Source: *Film World and A-V News*, 1956

Elsa Volckmann

Educational Film Library Association (EFLA) staff member

Source: *Sightlines*, 1968

Daniela A. Zhovnar

Customer relations representative at Capital Film Laboratories in Washington, D.C.

Source: *Business Screen*, 1969